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COIT, STANTON

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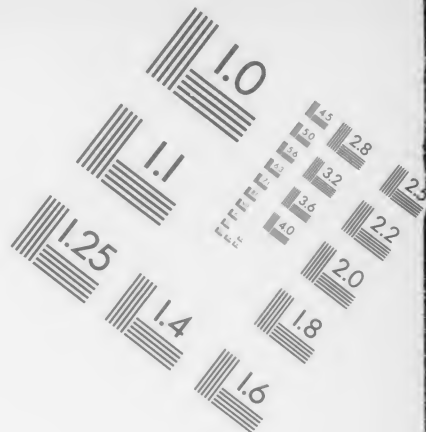
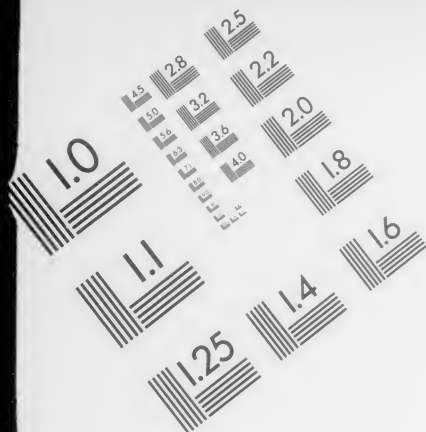
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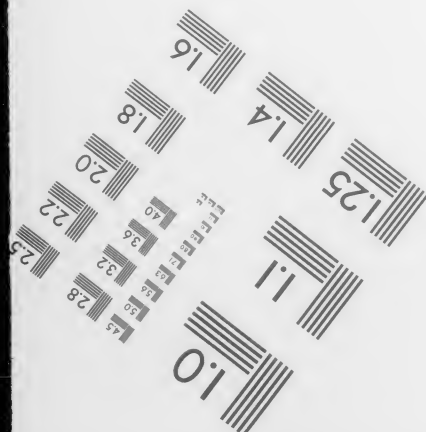
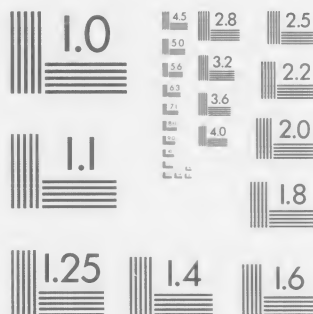
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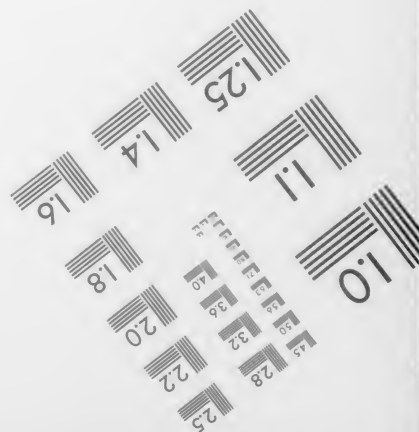
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ETHICAL LEAFLET.—No. 7.

THE ETHICAL MOVEMENT EXPLAINED.

BY DR. STANTON COIT.

THE aims and principles of the Ethical Movement are so very simple that anyone, although with no philosophical education, may both understand and sit in judgment upon them. One need not speak in parables or use symbolic language; but there is need of explanation. People are so accustomed, when religion is spoken of, to look for mystical and transcendental ideas, which are remote from men's common, everyday knowledge, that, when the whole nature of the Ethical Movement has been explained, they still look for something further. Its very simplicity makes them fail to understand it, or, if they understand, they fail to appreciate it. "Is that all?" they are apt to exclaim. But we count it no defect in our Ethical Movement that it is thus simple and close to the working thoughts of everyday life. This simplicity is one reason for the hope that it will some day reorganise the spiritual life of nations. Let us now set forth our main doctrines in barest outline.

The first of these is that *the bond of religious union should be solely devotion to the good in the world*. By "the good" is meant simply a certain quality of human character and conduct—the quality which we have in mind when we say that a judge is good, because he is impartial; that a father is good, because he looks out for the lasting welfare of his children; that a citizen is good, because he is willing to sacrifice personal gain to the prosperity of the whole people. The desire to spread more and more this quality of conduct and character, and to *root out badness from human life*, is, we affirm, the true bond of religious union among men.

Our second doctrine is that *each man must bestow the highest reverence of his heart, the feeling of absolute sacredness and inviolability, upon the doing of every individual duty as it presents itself to him*. In the sense of supreme worth and dignity, each duty is to be done; and, so far as the feeling of inviolability has been an element in religion, we affirm that *the doing of duty is religion*; with us every attack upon iniquity is a religious crusade. Every individual social reform which we take up becomes to us in sacredness a religious task. For us goodness must exist in human hearts

THE ETHICAL MOVEMENT EXPLAINED

and institutions; and to bring it into existence is the highest that we know. *We preach that right conduct is of supreme importance—more important than doctrine or ritual; aye, more important than the worship of a personal God or of Christ in the heart.* We believe that right conduct is the way, and the only way, of a joyful, peaceful, inspiring life. We believe that it is the way to attain a life of perfect selflessness, which has no anxiety about the future either before or after death, which is willing to become annihilated at death, if such be the lot in store for us. Devotion to right conduct is, we believe, the way, and the only way, from the haunting presence of our own past transgressions. Complete devotion to the right is the only act of atonement by which we can become reconciled with our past selves. Thus, right conduct, because it is the way of life to the individual and of gladness to society, is of supreme importance; every other attempt at self-reconciliation, or to attain strength and self-confidence, is folly and evil. *What food is to the hungry man, what water is to the parched lips, what the sun in spring-time is to the trees and flowers, such is right conduct to the inner spiritual life of man.* We preach this devotion to the good not only as the bond of fellowship, but as the way of inward peace and life.

But *preaching is not our chief means of furthering the spread of goodness throughout society.* We shall also attempt, so far as lies in our power, *to change the physical and social environment of men*, so that it shall be more favourable to a truly human life. The highest and most potent change we can effect is to provide people with fellowship in the moral life by *establishing Ethical Societies.* But this change of spiritual environment must be followed forthwith by physical, economic, and intellectual reforms, which only the whole community can effect. We expect the members of our society, by helping in these reforms, to do more for the community than the current morality of the day demands. We recognise that work for mankind of every sort is the most eloquent preaching. *There is no way to convince people that one believes in brotherhood like proving one's self a brother.*

Issued by the UNION OF ETHICAL SOCIETIES, 19, Buckingham Street, Strand, W.C. Corresponding Secretary, Miss F. Winterbottom, from whom further information about Ethical Societies can be obtained.

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